

QuickTakes

JUNIOR JOINTS

Back to School

As you hunt for new clothes and school supplies, be sure to also plan ahead to help your child with arthritis or related diseases get the most out of school. Patty Rettig, a pediatric rheumatology nurse practitioner in Philadelphia, offers these reminders as your kids head back to the classroom:

- Ask your child's doctor or other health-care provider to write a letter to school personnel explaining the specific ways arthritis affects your child and any modifications he might need.
- Establish a close relationship with someone at the school, such as the school nurse, who understands your child's needs and who can serve as a liaison between you and school administrators and teachers.
- Check out the school *before* classes start. Find out the distances between classes and consider any modifications your child may need to get around more easily. Also find out after the first few days what difficulties your child is having and seek solutions.
- Include your child in discussions of modifications, such as keeping a set of books at home and one at school, moving classes closer together, allowing the child to rest at lunchtime, and avoiding timed tests and handwriting grades.
- Contact the American Juvenile Arthritis Organization for other ideas. Call 404/872-7100 ext. 6277.

READER EXCHANGE

Bowls that Hold Their Own

Grip 'n Mix Bowls: by Rubbermaid. Available in most grocery and mass retail stores, these mixing bowls have rubber bottoms that keep them from slipping and long handles that are easy to grasp and hold. The bowls come in 1.5- and 3-quart sizes for \$2 to \$5.

SUBMITTED BY JANET M. MITCHELL
GOLETA, CALIF.

If you've found a product that makes life easier, let us know. Send the name and manufacturer and purchase price to Reader Exchange, *Arthritis Today*, 1330 W. Peachtree St., Atlanta, GA 30309.



HAND CARE

Beauty and the Brace

Doctors and occupational therapists often prescribe splints for hands and fingers weakened by rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and other conditions. Conventional splints made from moldable plastics or foam and held in place with straps can be bulky and confining. They get dirty, don't last long and often make the wearer feel conspicuous.

Cynthia Garriss, an occupational therapist who specializes in hand problems, was aware of these problems when she herself developed rheumatoid arthritis 25 years ago. So she began fashioning custom splints from sterling silver for herself and her patients. The designs were light, adjustable and durable (some last as long as 10 years), and looked so much like unique jewelry that she named them Siris ring splints.

In 1985, Garriss founded a small company to make the splints for other therapists' patients. Today, the Silver Ring Splint Company ships beautiful but highly functional custom-fitted splints in silver and gold – some set with onyx or other gems – to patients all over the world.

Concerned that she and her small staff could be overwhelmed by calls, Garriss prefers not to publish the company's telephone number. You can get Siris ring splints through occupational and physical therapists across the country.

— C. J. HOUTCHENS

FMSignals

Discovering Self-Confidence

BY JENNIFER RUGULA
SAN RAMON, CALIF.

"In high school, fibromyalgia wasn't in my vocabulary until my family doctor told me I had it. The anger, frustration and embarrassment of not being like my peers caused me to withdraw from socializing with other teenagers, and I delved further into my studies. Reading and writing took me to safe places where I was healthy and did not have to interact.

"My parents couldn't stand to watch me isolate myself any longer. During my sophomore year, they encouraged me to find a job to build my confidence and interact with adults. My maturity and reliability landed me a position in a family-owned package shipping business. At first, I worked a couple of hours per week and only moved lightweight packages. Over time I took on more hours and responsibilities, and I noticed I could shuffle heavier packages as my body became accustomed to bending and lifting.

"Parents have a way of knowing what is right for their children. Working gave me a sense of pride in myself that academics could not. At my job, I met adults and some teenagers who got to know me as a willing, competent worker. I became the self-assured, capable person my parents always knew I had the potential to be.

"Now I am a full-time college student at a university away from home. When I return home for breaks, I go back to work, earning extra money for school expenses. Academics will always be an important part of my life, but it is the familiar faces of the customers I've met over the years that remind me how far I've come in my struggle with fibromyalgia."

TRIED AND TRUE

Easy Earrings

If you like wearing pierced earrings but have a tough time with the tiny earring backs, consider buying french hook earrings. They're a popular style that slides on easily and stays in place without using earring backs. Look for them at local stores the next time you're buying earrings.

SUBMITTED BY FREDERICKA SIMS
PORT ORANGE, FLA.

A Tucking Trick

Painful hands and fingers can make putting sheets on your bed a troublesome task. To help make tucking in sheets easier, try holding a wooden spoon by the bowl end and using the long handle to push the sheets under the mattress.

SUBMITTED BY NORINE DENNIS
PUNTA GORDA, FLA.



NECK PAIN

WAKE UP ON WATER

Are your mornings a literal pain in the neck? The solution may be as simple as adding water. A recent Johns Hopkins University study shows that a water-based pillow may help people with chronic neck pain sleep better.

During the five-week study, 41 people with neck pain used a standard (down or foam) pillow for one week and then tried two options: a roll pillow and a water-based pillow for two weeks each. The water-based pillow they used is made of soft polyester fiber with a pouch of water, adjustable for firmness, and a thermal reflector.

After using the water-based pillow, the study participants reported "reduced morning pain intensity, increased pain relief and improved quality of sleep," says study co-author Marco Pappagallo, MD. Dr. Pappagallo believes the water-based pillow improves sleep because it allows the neck to make a natural adjustment. "It also appears that this pillow's thermal reflector lining may reflect heat generated by the neck and head. That, in turn, works like a hot pack through the night to help with pain relief," he adds.

The water pillow used in the study, the *Mediflow Waterbase* pillow, retails for \$49.95 at medical supply and home health-care stores.

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— LAURA DAILY

QuickTakes edited by Shelly Morrow